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A SERMON
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THE LIFE OF FAITH IN THE DAY OF CALAMITY.

Scripture Lesson: *Habakkuk* i.; ii. 1-4, 20; iii. 17-19.

"The Lord reigneth;
Let the earth rejoice;
Let the multitudes of isles be glad.
Clouds and darkness are round about Him:
Righteousness and judgment are the
foundation of His Throne."—*Psalm* xcvii. 1-2.

LAST Sunday evening, under the shadow of war which threatened, we considered together the declaration of another of these ancient Psalms. "The Lord sat King at the Flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever."

The affirmation with which this Psalm opens states inclusively the truth which was the theme of that meditation. The Lord reigneth. To-night I am principally interested in the second verse, which however must be considered in relation with its first affirmation. "The Lord reigneth; . . . Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His Throne."

How often, in days of sunlight and prosperity and gladness, we have quoted these words. They have expressed our faith in briefest and most inclusive form. We have been perfectly honest and sincere as we have declared our conviction that while clouds and darkness are often round about His Throne, righteousness and judgment are the foundation thereof.

Now faith is that by which men live. The all-inclusive word of God to the perplexed prophet in the olden time was this, "The just shall live by his faith." Faith has to do with things which are not demonstrable by the activity of sense; or, in the

language of the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Faith is . . . the proving of things not seen." Faith is sure of something that cannot be seen, and inspires activity which is in harmony with that assurance. Such activity results in the demonstration of the reality of the unseen things.

By faith in things not seen, men live. Strength of life is proven in days of stress and strain. No ship can demonstrate its strength under a blue sky and in calm waters. It is in the day of tempest and hurricane, when Euroclydon tosses the deep into fury, that the strength of the ship is discovered. The strength of man's life is never known under calm skies, in quiet places, and in days of prosperity. The strength of a nation, while existing, is never known until darkness and disaster threaten. If it be true that a man lives by faith, and that the strength of life is proved in days of stress and strain, it follows that the value of a man's faith is proved in days of stress and strain.

In days of quietness, peace, sunshine and prosperity we have affirmed our belief that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne, even though clouds and darkness may be round about that throne. How is it with us to-day?

The clouds and the darkness are palpable. The heavens are black with wrath, the earth is red with wrack. The only gleams, making the darkness visible, are those of the lightnings, born of the clash of the clouds with each other or with the earth. What have we to say concerning the declaration that righteousness and judgment are the foundation of the Throne of our God?

In this evening hour of solemn assembly amid the shadows, in the midst of the darkness, we affirm our conviction that the faith that we professed in the days of prosperity is a true faith. We declare that we believe that righteousness and judgment are the foundation of God's Throne.

We call as witness to our faith the strange and wonderful testimony of history. We remind ourselves in the midst of the darkness, that over and over again, with the persistence of unbroken regularity, as the centuries pass and the millenniums go, out of tragedy, convulsion, and desolation, prosperity, peace, and beauty have emerged.

I looked; aside the dust-cloud rolled,
  The Waster seemed the Builder too;
Upspringing from the ruined Old,
  I saw the New.

We affirm, moreover, that these things have been so, by reason of the government of the Everlasting God; by His refusal to allow anything that He has created ultimately to escape the boundary of His hand and His rule. In tragedy there is nothing that makes for prosperity; in convulsion, with its moral upheaval, there is nothing which makes for peace; in desolation there is no beauty; but enwrapping the whole of these dark and ghastly experiences, there has been the mystic might of the merciful God, transmuting the base metal into pure gold, and leading

humanity forward, however hard the pangs of pain and sorrow and suffering, into things higher and yet greater.

The Day of the Lord is at hand, at hand!
  Its storms roll up the sky;
The Nations sleep starving on heaps of gold;
  All dreamers toss and sigh;
The night is darkest before the morn;
When the pain is sorest the child is born,
  And the Day of the Lord is at hand!

We affirm our faith, not merely by the witness of history, but on the testimony of the central historic Word of God, the Word Incarnate. We remind our hearts, while the shadows are over us, and the desolation is about us, of that strange moment in the history of the Man of Nazareth, when under the shadow of the olives in Gethsemane's Garden, He said to His enemies: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." Now, after two millenniums have run their course, we know that that was His hour, and the victory of Light. Over and over again, as humanity has followed the gleam and the glory of that earthly revelation, or has turned back into the mists and miasmas of its own inexplicable follies, there have come again awful hours in which the self-same Voice, speaking on behalf of humanity, might have said, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." Such hours have always been hours of Divine victory and of the breaking of new light.

We are in the midst of such an hour to-day. That which was said in the Great Abbey on Sunday last by the Primate of the Anglican Church, is something we need to lay to heart. He declared that this war is not of God's inspiring; it is of the devil. "The Lord reigneth . . . Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His Throne."

Finally, we comfort and strengthen our faltering faith, not merely by the witness of history, not only by the central historic Word Incarnate, but by our own past experiences. In comparison with the national calamities of to-day our personal experiences may seem paltry and insignificant; but every human soul is a microcosm of humanity, and there is a sense in which there is no aggregate of sorrows. Consequently, I look back to-day upon my own past life, to hours of desolate darkness, and so help me God, I solemnly affirm as in His presence, that those are the hours I would not now miss out of my life on any account, for out of them there came light.

In such hours supremely, we must live by faith. How, then, shall we live by our faith?

First, we must know our faith. The measure of intelligent apprehension is the measure of strength in faith. We sometimes speak of "simple faith," and there is such a thing as simple faith; but there is a faith that grows out of that first activity, which is illuminated, intelligent, apprehending the meaning of that upon which faith first fastened. That is the larger faith and the truer faith, the firmer faith, which men often find through

periods of mental struggle, and material disaster, and spiritual agony. I repeat, we must know our faith.

Secondly and principally, we must act in harmony with our faith, for the one and final sin that destroys a human soul or a nation is the sin of disloyalty to conviction.

What, then, is our faith? The fundamental affirmation of the Psalm declares it inclusively.

"The Lord reigneth!"

Who, then, is the Lord? He is Love, He is Light, He is Life. Love reigneth over all hatred; Light is supreme over all darkness; and Life is victor even over the desolations of death. This does not mean that there is neither hate, nor darkness, nor death; neither does it mean that Love cannot suffer, but that it does suffer; that Light can never pass under eclipse, but that it does so, in order to break with new glory; that Life can never know death, for our Priest after the order of the endless life did die. It does mean that Love reigns and rules, that Light is final and supreme, and that Life will win its last victory. Therefore, hate and darkness and death are already conquered even in the process of conflict.

In the great words of the text we have the interpretation of the nature of the Divine government. "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His Throne." That means that the principles of Divine government are those of righteousness and judgment. It means that the purpose of Divine government, the goal toward which that government is for ever moving, can best be expressed in the self-same words, righteousness and judgment.

Yet, as I attempt exposition, I am in danger of robbing the text of its true force and impact. Let the word of the text abide—Foundation! The declaration means that apart from righteousness and judgment the very throne of God would be insecure!

What, then, are the thoughts suggested by these old and familiar words? Righteousness is straightness, conformity to a standard. What standard? The standard of God, Who reigns according to what He is, in character. How are we to know what that is? By the history of His dealings with men; and finally and supremely by His unveiling of Himself in the Person of the Man of Nazareth. The mystic poet of Galilee declared to men what he saw in the unveiling:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), *full of grace and truth.*"

The elements of righteousness are grace and truth. Jesus one day said of the arch-enemy of mankind, He is a liar from the beginning, that is, one who is opposed to truth. He said of him in the self-same connection, He is a manslayer from the beginning; that is, the enemy of peace and grace.

The foundation of the Throne of God is righteousness, in which there merge *truth*, which brooks no deviation from the standard of strict integrity by man or nation; and *grace*, which is set upon the deliverance, the uplifting of humanity, and its restoration to a lost Divine ideal. Judgment also, which suggests the activity which realises righteousness. Judgment is a rich and most glorious word, in the presence of which we often tremble, and verily so we should; but in the presence of which, if we do but hear its music, we should rejoice on the darkest day.

The judgment of God is His executive activity. It has many notes, many methods. It is wooing, and anon it is warning. It is winning, and anon it is winnowing. I observe the going forth of the Divine judgment, and I find therein the lure of the infinite Love, and I find again the fierceness of the infinite Wrath. I mark God's executive dealing with men, and I am amazed at the sweetness of the caress of His lips, and I am awe-struck at the awfulness of the curses which He pronounces. Judgment is executive ability; the power that makes for righteousness; the over-ruling of the affairs of men that moves right forward to the glorious day, in which after clash and conflict, every man shall know Him, and live in the beatitude of His Government.

Righteousness and judgment are the things for which He looks. When Isaiah sang his song of the vineyard his contrasts were startling. He said that God looked for judgment, and found shedding of blood! He looked for righteousness, and He found a shriek—for our softer translation "oppression" and "a cry" rob the great Hebrew passage of its force. He looked among the sons of men for judgment, and He found shedding of blood. He looked for righteousness, and heard the shriek of the oppressed. That is true to-day! Nevertheless, He did not abandon His purpose; He moved right on, as the Biblical history shows, until there came a moment when His Son commenced His public ministry with this great statement: "It becometh us to fulfil all *righteousness*"; and ended by declaring: "Now is the *judgment* of this world."

This, then, to summarise, is our faith. God reigns. He reigns in righteousness and judgment. He reigns in spite of clouds and darkness. Nay, I will amend the declaration; He reigns in righteousness and judgment, and proceeds by these principles to the fulfilment of the purposes, oft-times by means of clouds and darkness. To take the tragic and awful illustration in the midst of which we live; war is man's wickedness, but out of it there has been, and there shall be, the rebirth of the soul, the renewal of the moral conscience. I solemnly affirm in this hour, and in this place, that these facts of Divine government are already manifest.

If that is our faith, what, then, must our life be to-day? Here in briefest sentences, and with a great sense of solemnity and responsibility, I want to speak of the situation. Our country is at war; our sons are marching to bloody death; our women and children are stricken, and stern desolation and distress are with us. We are at war, after the most strenuous efforts for peace.

That is granted. I am among the number of those who to the eleventh hour, and until the striking of the twelfth, hoped that we should remain neutral. There are those whom we highly honour, who even now are not prepared to take up the position which is forced upon me. I resolutely say to you to-night that after Sir Edward Grey's statement, and the White Paper published on Wednesday, I have no doubt that every effort was made that could be made to avert war. If I have preached from this pulpit for ten years, and if my people who have heard me do not know how all my nature, under Christ's mastery, hates war, then I have failed. Nevertheless, I am bound to say to-night that I am convinced that not to have interfered would have been to have consented to disregard the obligations of national morality. We are at war, after strenuous efforts for peace, in behalf of weaker nations, and in the interests of righteousness and judgment. We have fulfilled the first part of Polonius' advice to Laertes:

"Beware of entrance to a quarrel."

Now we must fulfil the second half:

"But being in,
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee."

That is the true attitude of the moment—dark, terrible, and tragic; but necessary!

What, then, is to be the activity of those of us who hold this faith, and stand confronting this dire necessity?

The first activity of faith will be that of prayer. I resolutely put it first. May I remind you, my comrades in the Christian faith, for to such I would especially speak, that Christianity—not now using the word in its wider application, but its personal experience—Christianity means access to God. He has created of believers a dynasty of priests; and the first function of the believing soul is that of priestly intercession. Access to God means confession of sins; it means repentance for sin, and that mediatorially. All Christian souls should ever be confessors, not of their own sins alone, but of the sins of all other men.

I have already recited words that fell from the lips of Jesus on the banks of the Jordan as He commenced His public ministry. Hear them once more. When John protested that he had no right to baptise this clean, pure soul, said Jesus: "*Thus* it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." What is the meaning of the "*thus*?" What was He doing? Confessing sin. Consenting to a baptism that was the baptism of repentance. In other words, He bore the sins of others upon His conscience, and upon His soul, as though they were His own sins. Thus He fulfilled all righteousness. Our work as Christian people to-day, not in the spirit of the Pharisee who stands outside and reflects upon the sinner, but in the spirit of unity and identity with all of our nation and our race, is to confess our sins. I am not going to-night to speak of national sins. There have been national sins, but I will not refer to any one in detail. We know them. Our first business is to confess; but in this very confession there must be intercession. We need to pray to-day as never before.

What must we pray for? We must pray for the glory of God. We need have no fear in praying that prayer, for—forgive me if I put it bluntly in order to put briefly the thing I want to say—the glory of God is not the aggrandisement of a despot, it is the satisfying of a Father's heart in the ultimate healing and blessing of His children. We must pray for the glory of God, and continue to pray, however dark the day become, and however dark the circumstances grow.

We must pray for peace, always remembering that in the economy of God peace must be based upon purity, always remembering that a peace is not worth while which is not built upon rectitude. We must pray for purity and for peace.

We must pray for all who suffer, and all who serve in these days. I need not argue it. We are ready to do it. Then let our readiness have expression in the actual deed. Pray for those who are suffering in mind, body, and estate. Pray for those who serve. Pray for the soldiers. We are thankful to God for the readiness of the sons of the nation to go forth upon the stern duty; but can we look at marching men, without a pang and a pain in the heart? Oh! the horror of the whole thing! Let us pray for them, that they may be kept true to themselves, and to God, while they are true to their country's need. Let us pray for all those who minister to-day, especially for surgeons and nurses in all their difficult and delicate and yet wonderful work, that they may be sustained.

Once more we must pray; and I will not tell you now for what, but ask you to listen if you dare!

"Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you."

Oh troubled heart, oh! Adam heart of mine. It is not easy! But oh! man within me, that has seen the Face of Jesus, and knows that in His hour of darkness He did say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Pray for those who to-day are counted as enemies!

The people against whom we fight are not really enemies. If there be one issue we more supremely desire out of all this than another, it is that after this, never again shall handfuls of men be able to command millions to the slaughter at their will.

Life by our faith to-day is life conformed to the principles upon which the Throne of God is founded, righteousness and judgment. We must act in grace. I take out of the great word one meaning, and one quality only, and it is this—Compassion.

I am thankful for every letter that has appeared in our public newspapers appealing to all of us that in this hour, if there shall be in our nation remaining, as there certainly are, members of the German people, that we treat them kindly. That does not mean that we are to be weak and vacillating when there is any peril; in such cases we must act sternly. But with those who are law abiding and naturally distressed we must be very compassionate.

And so further, and this needs no argument; to all who suffer, not merely to those who are in the fight, but to those who are bound to suffer in the next weeks and months from the reaction of war upon the supply of necessities, to be true to our faith, we must be compassionate.

This conformity to principle must also be of the character of Truth. Unswerving loyalty to right, must be the attitude that we take up in all these days, until the conflict be past.

We must also act in conformity with the judgment of God; that is, our lives must be lives in which the activities which ensure results are to be discovered. That is a great ground for consideration. I need not stay for illustration, save, perhaps, in one or two minor, and yet important and practical matters. We who have this faith must live to-day by the law of self-restraint and self-sacrifice. A Christian woman or man who at this hour stores the necessities of life, is playing false to the faith we profess. It would be arrogant and impertinent for me to mention any attitude of mine were it not that it may help. Immediately, all the order of my own living has been changed. The order of my household to-day is that we buy to-day what we need to-day, that there may be no storage; and we follow the simplest form of living in order that those who are most needy may not presently be in want and in distress. I want thus to emphasise in this pulpit that matter to which attention has been drawn, thank God, so constantly in the public press.

Finally, if we are to act in accord with the principles upon which the very Throne of God is founded, we must give ourselves to service, whatever service comes to us. I know the difficulties are numerous. We are not quite clear, we do not immediately know what we can do; but we do know that the true attitude of all who believe that the Lord reigneth is that anything they can do, they are eager to do; anything they can do, they will do. In proportion as the Christian Church of this nation—and I use the beautiful phrase in all its Catholicity—will take up this attitude, we shall be true to our faith, and the nation itself will be kept firm and quiet and steady.

Not for hate are we at war; not for purposes of aggrandisement or the capture of territory are we at war; but for a principle of morality, and of righteousness.

Then let us pray that the war may soon end; that victory may be with the Kingdom of our God; and until the day break, let us be quiet and strong and active in our service. May God help us!

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ONE PENNY.

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